

## Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

### פרשת שמות

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם אֵת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ

**“And these are the names of the sons of Yisrael who came to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came” (1:1)**

The parsha begins with an emphasis on the names of Yaakov’s family because these names are one of the three uniquely Jewish traits that they carefully retained during their stay in Egypt. Their commitment to not changing their names, dress and language helped them maintain a separate identity in a foreign land. Rabbi Gavriel Ginsberg of Toronto pointed out that these are customs, not mitzvos, which shows us that customs are powerful and should never be minimized. These customs of Jewish identity are critical because they protect us from assimilation and intermarriage.

The opening posuk also refers to another strategy that helped them remain committed to their values in a challenging culture. Chizkuni explains that the phrase “each man and his household” refers to a husband and wife as a couple. Yaakov made sure that all of his family members were married before they went down to Egypt because he knew that immorality was a feature of Egyptian culture and he was afraid to expose his descendants to such temptation without the protection provided by marriage. We find a similar idea in connection with Yosef. The Torah tells us that after he was appointed as ruler, he married Osnas before traveling around the land of Egypt (Bereishis 41:45). He wanted to ensure that he was married before traveling around the country. This teaches us the importance of marriage as well as the importance of setting up appropriate safeguards to protect ourselves against the enticements of modern culture.

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד בְּמֵאֵד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם

**“The Children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very, very strong, and the land became filled with them” (1:7)**

The last thing we read before the slavery of the Jewish people began is that “the land became filled with them.” This seems to indicate that they

left the Jewish enclave of Goshen and spread out across the entire land of Egypt. This was dangerous because they now found themselves living among Egyptians and they did not even have the Torah to protect them, which led to their spiritual decline and the punishment of difficult slavery. It is important to live in a Jewish community among similarly minded people who will encourage and support one another.

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיִלְדָּכֶן אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהַמֶּתֶן אֹתוֹ וְאִם בַּת הִיא וְחִיָּה

**“And he said: When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall put him to death, but if it is a daughter, she may live” (1:16)**

Why did Pharaoh want to kill the baby boys? Rashi says that his astrologers foresaw the birth of a Jewish savior and this decree was an attempt to make sure that the savior did not survive infancy. Chizkuni says that this was part of Pharaoh’s overall plan to control and limit the Jewish population in order to make sure that they would not revolt. The first step he took was to enslave them, which would exhaust them and leave them with no energy to start families. But when this did not work, he tried to prevent any boys from surviving so that there would not be any soldiers for an uprising.

וּתִירְאֵנָה הַמִּילָדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּדֶד מִצְרַיִם וּתְסַיְיֵן אֶת הַיְלָדִים

**“The midwives, however, feared Hashem; so they did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them, but they enabled the boys to live” (1:17)**

The Torah stresses the midwives’ fear of Hashem in connection with their refusal to follow Pharaoh’s command because this attitude gives a person the courage to stand up to anyone. They were risking their lives by disobeying Pharaoh’s decree, but they feared Hashem above all. But when fear of Hashem is lacking, then there are no moral boundaries and anything goes. Avraham said as much to Avimelech, telling him that he feared for his life in Gerar because “there is no fear of Hashem in this place” (Bereishis 20:11).

וַיְהִי כִּי יֵרְאוּ הַמִּיּוֹלָדוֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים

**“Now it took place when the midwives feared Hashem, that He made houses for them” (1:21)**

The midwives, identified by Chazal as Yocheved and Miriam, were rewarded with houses of kohanim, leviyim and kings. These special statuses were only conferred on their descendants years later, but the Torah tells us about the reward at this point so that we can connect the dots across the decades. It is important for us to remember that even though we often do not see the reward for our good deeds immediately, they are prescribed in heaven right away to be fulfilled at a later time.

The rewards that they received were appropriate for what they had done. They had enabled the growth of Jewish families, so they were rewarded to become the matriarchs of their own eminent families. Similarly, in the merit of Yocheved rescuing Jewish boys from a decree of death, so her son Moshe was one day rescued from Pharaoh’s decree of drowning.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי

**“A man of the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi” (2:1)**

Chazal teach us that Amram and Yocheved originally separated because they did not want to have children who would die as a result of Pharaoh’s decree. Their daughter Miriam pointed out that this was worse than what Pharaoh had done because Pharaoh only tried to kill the baby boys, but Amram and Yocheved were not having girls either if they were separated. Not only that, but Pharaoh was depriving the babies of life in this world, while Amram and Yocheved were not even allowing the souls to be born and earn a share in the World to Come. Seeing the wisdom in her words, they re-married and Moshe was born. This teaches us an interesting lesson. When people decide not to have children, in a certain sense they are preventing those potential children from life in both this world and the next.

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The Torah describes the birth of Moshe, but omits the identification of his parents, which would seem to be an important detail. Why are Moshe’s

parents, Amram and Yocheved, not mentioned by name? The Yalkut Shimoni says that Amram was the leader of the generation. If the Torah had said their names outright, we would think that a person could only become as great as Moshe Rabbeinu if his parents were illustrious personalities. The Torah mentions them anonymously to teach us that anyone can become a great person like Moshe. People who come from all types of backgrounds can become great because Torah is not something that can be inherited. It has to be earned, not transmitted genetically.

The same idea could explain why the Torah refers to the heroic Jewish midwives as Shifra and Puah despite the fact that they are identified by Chazal as Miriam and Yocheved. It does not take someone of great lineage to act with such courage and self-sacrifice. Anyone can do it, no matter where they come from.

וַתֵּרֶד בַּת פַּרְעֹה לְרַחֵץ עַל הַיָּאֵר וַנִּעְרְתֶיהָ הַלְכַת עַל יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתִּרְא אֶת הַתְּבָה בַּתּוֹךְ  
הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אַמָּתָהּ וַתִּקְחֶהּ

**“Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe, to the Nile, and her maidens were walking along the Nile, and she saw the basket in the midst of the marsh, and she sent her maidservant, and she took it” (2:5)**

Chazal teach that Pharaoh’s daughter went to the river to cleanse herself of idolatry. The Baal HaTurim sees this idea hinted in the words of the posuk: The final letters of the words וַתֵּרֶד בַּת פַּרְעֹה spells דתה, which means “her religion,” indicating that she was leaving behind her old beliefs. Perhaps that is why she merited to save Moshe Rabbeinu. Each mitzvah that a person performs acts as a magnet to bring in other mitzvah opportunities. We have to realize that if we take advantage of every chance that we have to do a mitzvah, it will start a virtuous cycle.

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבִאֵהוּ לְבַת פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן הַמַּיִם  
מִשִּׁיתָהוּ

**“The child grew up, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became like her son. She named him Moshe, and she said: For I drew him from the water” (2:10)**

The Midrash says that Moshe had ten names, yet Hashem only called him by the name Moshe, the name that was given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. What is it about this name that Hashem chose to use it exclusively? R' Chaim Shmuelevitz answers that Pharaoh's daughter transgressed the decree of her father in order to save Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe became a beneficiary of her tremendous personal sacrifice. As a result, this characteristic became ingrained in him and personal sacrifice became a part of his life.

Another answer is that Moshe owed his life to Pharaoh's daughter and so he used the name that would always remind him of her act of kindness. Developing a sense of gratitude toward others is of utmost importance. When a person feels grateful to the people who have helped him, then he will also feel grateful to Hashem and appreciate all the wonderful gifts that he has received from Him.

וַיֵּצֵא בַיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וַהֲגִה שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים עִבְרִים נֹצְיִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרָשָׁע לָמָּה תִכֶּה רֵעִי  
**“He went out on the second day, and behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling, and he said to the wicked one: Why are you going to strike your friend?” (2:13)**

Rashi says that Moshe called the man an evildoer because he had raised his hand against another person, even if he did not strike him. But if he had not actually hit the other person, why did Moshe say “why are you hitting him”? Moshe was trying to show him the importance of foresight and proactive self-control. One cannot raise a hand against someone, because if he does, it is almost certain that he will hit him. We have to recognize where things lead and stop ourselves before we go too far. That is the message that Moshe was trying to convey by saying that the man had hit his fellow even though he had not actually done so yet.

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שָׂמְךָ לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשֹׁפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלִהְרַגְנִי אַתָּה אֹמֵר כַּאֲשֶׁר הָרַגְתָּ אֶת  
הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר  
**“And he retorted: Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian? Moshe became frightened and said: Indeed, the matter has become known!” (2:14)**

What exactly became known to Moshe at this time? Rashi explains that upon hearing the threat of slander, Moshe exclaimed: “The question that I always wondered about is now understood to me. How have the Jewish people sinned that they, out of all the nations of the world, deserve to be stuck in such harsh slavery? But I now see that they deserve it.”

The idea that slander delays redemption is an important lesson for us in our own protracted exile. Speech is the special power of the Jewish people and when we misuse it, there are repercussions. We live in a negative world where it is acceptable to speak badly about other people all the time and when we read these types of articles in the news it has an influence on how we talk about the people in our lives. We have to remember that the second Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of such baseless hatred and be careful to prevent negativity from seeping into our thoughts and words.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman  
Written by Michael Gutmann*